
Modernity, Eternity, Tradition

The authentic concept of universal history is a messianic one. . . . the true conception of historical time is wholly based on the image of redemption.

Walter Benjamin

In the move from the existential origins of temporalization in identification and misrecognition to the temporalization of history, eternity joins *death*, the *unconscious*, and *nature* as a figure of timelessness, and each becomes a metaphor for the others. It is to the character and dynamics of this move – the modalities of Ricoeur’s narrative inscriptions – that we will shortly turn, picking up the analysis of historical time where it was broken off, at the end of chapter 2, and carrying it forward in the direction of two specific temporalizations of history, two very different articulations of an atemporal eternity with the contents of historical experience: *modernity* and *tradition*. First, however, it is necessary to say a little more about this purely anticipatory, timeless end which, we have argued, temporalizes historical time (historizes temporality) in the same way that the anticipation of death temporalizes time in general. What is the ontological status of an end posited in exteriority and thereby paradoxically present, phenomenologically, within the very thing to which it is by definition exterior (time)? In particular, to what extent can it be understood independently of the *theological* connotations with which it is inevitably associated in the context of the Judaic-Christian tradition? After all, is not the idea of a timeless exteriority, productive of history yet in principle outside its grasp, even more unequivocally theological than the immanent end of Hegel’s ‘true theodicy’, which we would have it displace? Does the philosophy of history not reveal itself here, once again, as an inherently theological genre, even in the new, apparently secular garb of a post-Hegelian philosophy of historical time?¹

Unless we can counter this all-too-common charge, we remain vulnerable to the threat of a dialectical reversal which would detect in our quest for the ontological structure of historical time a relegitimation of theology on post-Hegelian grounds. This is something that Heidegger's own work came increasingly, and knowingly, to represent, albeit with respect to a mystical neo-paganism, rather than the monotheism of the Judaic or Christian traditions.² It is apparent in the growing appeal to Judaism 'at the end of the end of philosophy',³ marked by the reception of Levinas's work. And it is explicit in the writings of those for whom postmodernism provides the occasion for a restoration of theology as 'post-secular' reason.⁴

Our project – the development of a post-Hegelian philosophy of historical time in the form of a critical hermeneutics of historical existence – aims to hold true to the situation and dilemmas of a secular modernity. Yet one of these dilemmas concerns the persistence of the language of religion, given the relations which obtain, historically, between philosophy and theology in Western thought. We shall approach this problem, as we shall the elaboration of the historical meaning of timeless exteriority more generally, through the work of Walter Benjamin: specifically, the concept of *messianic interruption* as reworked by Benjamin in his recasting of the mystical tradition of Jewish eschatology in the service of historical materialism. For in their conjugation of materialism with metaphysics, and their distance from all materialist metaphysics, Benjamin's later writings offer a clear alternative to the theologization of exteriority to be found in work such as Levinas's, while nonetheless employing a similar structure of thought. In particular, they insist upon treating the temporalization of history historically, through the medium of cultural form. They thereby provide us with the opportunity to return from 'the frozen waste of abstraction,'⁵ on which we have struggled to articulate the concept of historical time so far, to the shore of historical experience, where we can rejoin the debates about historical periodization and cultural change (social and political theory) from which we set out.

It is important in this regard that 'modernity' is thematized in Benjamin's work not merely as a distinct form of temporal experience, produced by a range of social practices and forms (the 'quality of experience' outlined in chapter 1), but as a decisive mutation of *historical* experience, which gains its meaning from its dialectical relations to tradition. As a periodizing concept, modernity marks out the time of the dialectics of modernity and tradition as competing, yet intertwined, forms of historical consciousness, rather than that of a

single temporal form, however abstract. It is here that Benjamin's work may be compared with that of Heidegger and Ricoeur, upon which we have mainly relied thus far for resources for our argument. For it is a distinctive feature of both Heidegger's and Ricoeur's work that it depends upon the category of tradition to establish that continuity with the past which is a condition of historical existence. Heidegger and Ricoeur each temporalize history as tradition (*Überlieferung*) or 'handing down'. Gadamer's hermeneutics – founded on the extension of Heidegger's analytic of *Dasein* into a general theory of hermeneutical experience – takes the form of a hermeneutics of tradition. Yet, ostensibly at least, the temporality of modernity stands opposed to that of tradition. It is not just, as Habermas has argued, that Gadamer's hermeneutics fails adequately to recognize the transcending power of reflection in modern societies;⁶ more fundamentally, it fails to register the transformation which these societies have brought about in the basic form of what Gadamer calls 'effective-historical consciousness'. Neither Heidegger nor Ricoeur, Gadamer or Habermas, grasps sufficiently clearly that the question of modernity is not just, or even primarily, that of the powers and illusions of a constitutive subjectivity, but rather that of the temporalization of history itself.

Benjamin's position is far more radical. For him, modernity is in principle a *destruction* of tradition: it involves the inauguration of new forms of historical consciousness, of necessity. Its present is defined, historically, not just by its negation of the past, but by its negation of the past form of temporal negation (tradition). Yet, paradoxically, it is to the intellectual form of a 'failed' tradition (Jewish Messianism) that Benjamin turns for sustenance in his reflections 'On the Concept of History'. In the comprehension of this paradox lies the key to an understanding of the dialectical relationship of modernity to tradition which would not try to soothe the negativity of modernity with the balm of tradition, but would instead seek to produce the redemptive power associated with tradition anew, through and within the temporality of modernity itself. Benjamin's aim was to refigure the interruptive temporality of modernity as the standpoint of redemption and thereby to perform a dialectical redemption of the destruction of tradition by the new; to turn *Neuzeit* into *Jetztzeit*, new-time into now-time.

In the process, his work shifts the focus of historiography away from narrative forms of historical totalization to montage: from story to *image*. In particular, one form of narrative totalization, one kind of narrative – of progress – is read as an artificial restitution of the dead form of tradition through and as what I shall call, following Hegel, a

false or 'bad' modernity.⁷ What Benjamin calls 'historicism' is the functional replacement within the time-consciousness of modernity for the continuity of historical time previously established by tradition. Historicism is bad modernity. It provides the temporal framework for the problematic of modernization. Modernization is bad modernity. In the critique of historicism as blank tradition, the secularized eschatology of 'progress' appears more closely tied to the metaphysical presumptions of a religious consciousness than a historiography which is explicitly modelled, methodologically, on the structure of Jewish Messianism. New-time (*Neuzeit*) becomes the now-time (*Jetztzeit*) of a materialist messianism for which the exteriority of the messianic is found to be paradoxically immanent to the structure of temporality itself.⁸

It is in its criticisms of narrative totalizations of history and of historicism as bad modernity, respectively, that Benjamin's work engages most directly with the main themes of Ricoeur's and Heidegger's writings about time. In the first case, we may ask whether the temporalities of story and image, narrative and montage, are actually as opposed to one another as Benjamin's account supposes. In the latter, we may compare Benjamin's critique of historicism and his appeal to a quasi-Messianic 'now', with Heidegger's counterposition of what he calls 'the ordinary conception of history' to the authentic reception of a heritage in a 'moment of vision': the anticipatory time-consciousness of 'resolute decision'. This comparison reveals both the fundamental *modernism* of Heidegger's work, despite its appeal to tradition (an appeal which, as Derrida has pointed out, is 'in no way traditional'),⁹ and the problematic relationship of Benjamin's work to the politics with which it is allied (Communism) – indeed, to any politics which would mediate its construction of collectivity reflectively, through discourse, rather than rely upon an impulse to action derived from a direct revelation of truth. On the other hand, the differences between the forms of temporality at stake in Benjamin's and Heidegger's work may be taken as emblematic of the extent to which modernity contains a range of possible temporalizations of history within its fundamental, most abstract temporal form. It is the idea of a competition or struggle between these different forms of temporalization, within everyday life, which leads to the idea of a *politics* of time.

First, however, let us consider the ontological status of the timeless end, the anticipation of which, we have argued, is productive of historical time, yet which nonetheless remains in principle beyond its scope. For unless we can counter the theologization of this end, any

attempt to connect historical totalization with politics will be rendered problematic from the start. What exactly is it, this historicizing timelessness, external to history yet present within it, phenomenologically, as the anticipation of its end? To raise the question in this way is to place ourselves on the terrain of Levinas's thought.¹⁰

Exteriority and transcendence: Levinas's eschatology

It is the achievement of Levinas's work, firstly, that it offers a phenomenology of the constitutive role of the other in human temporalization;¹¹ secondly, that it refuses reconciliation (Hegel's 'pure self-recognition in absolute otherness'), treating relations to others in terms of *separation* and *desire*, as well as *identification* (in a phenomenological parallel to the discourse of psychoanalysis);¹² thirdly, that by treating the other as the site of an absolute exteriority, it recognizes the necessity to move beyond phenomenology to *eschatology*;¹³ and finally, that in moving towards eschatology, it nonetheless continues to insist that the beyond 'not be described in a purely negative fashion . . . [but be] reflected *within* the totality and history, *within* experience'.¹⁴ In refusing Heidegger's existential reduction of *Dasein* to the 'mineness' of death, Levinas opens up another dimension to temporality besides the time of Being-towards-death: *the time of the other* as a time which includes a future after-my-death, in relation to which I constitute myself as a historical being within the present, in my orientation towards, and responsibility for, others. This future is the product of neither an extrapolation of protentions (Husserl), nor of *Dasein*'s 'stretching-along' (Heidegger), but of the 'original and concrete temporality' of 'responsiveness to the Other'.¹⁵ It is part of a time in which there is a way of 'being *against* death' without fleeing from it; in which 'the founding of institutions . . . ensures a meaningful, but impersonal world beyond death'; and in which 'I can die *as a result of someone* and *for someone*.'¹⁶ Whether this 'empties . . . [death] of the pathos that comes to it from the fact of its being my death', as Levinas suggests,¹⁷ is doubtful. But it certainly adds a complex social dimension to the meaning of death and, with it, the temporalization of time.

It might thus seem, at first sight, that Levinas is offering us precisely what we need, philosophically, at this point in our argument: namely, a generalization of the dialectic of misrecognition into an eschatological conception of historical time. However, such a conclusion would be precipitate, if not (like much of the current enthusiasm for Levinas's

work) merely wishful. For despite its affinity with the argument we have advanced so far, the trajectory of Levinas's thought diverges from it in at least two important respects. In the first place, having derived its 'phenomenology of sociality' from – albeit also against – Husserl, there is no place in Levinas's thought for a constitutive concept of recognition/misrecognition. Secondly, and consequently, in fixing the (phenomenologically paradoxical) absoluteness of the exteriority of the other in the notion of *the* 'absolutely other', Levinas brings to an abrupt halt the movement he sets in motion between phenomenology and eschatology, switching to a third, more purely theological level of discourse. From this standpoint, history is homogenized as totality in opposition to the eschatological beyond, which grounds temporality, while infinity is reserved for the description of 'the ethical'. The rapidity of this movement is instructive. For it both demonstrates the unresolved character of Levinas's relation to ontology (summed up in the word 'God'), and reveals the arbitrariness of the religious interpretation of philosophical discourse which it enacts. In Levinas's thought, religion and the ethical usurp the space of history and the social which is opened up by his idea of a time of the other. In this respect, the vogue for Levinas may be read as a symptom of a crisis in historical thought, in which the desire for ethics overwhelms the necessity of politics, with its attendant complexities of historical consciousness and action.

Yet the lessons we can learn from Levinas are by no means wholly negative. For in exploring the limits and, crucially, the point of *rupture* of a phenomenological investigation of the other, Levinas has much to contribute to the clarification of the methodology of our inquiry – a methodology which, starting out from (1) Heidegger's phenomenological ontology, has subsequently had recourse to three additional ontological discourses: those of (2) the *constitutive exteriority of nature* (registered in the connection of cosmological time to death); (3) the *mediating productivity of the social* (registered by the constitutive relation to the other); and (4) the *overarching unity of history* (understood as the ongoing totalization of the social against the backdrop of an infinite nature). Psychoanalytical theory provides a mediating form for thinking the relations between the first three of these four perspectives, from the standpoint of the individual, in its discourse of primary identification as primary socialization. But its limitations prohibit it from thinking the fourth at all, except symptomatically, at the level of the psychic investments structuring its various representations.¹⁸

Levinas, on the other hand, explicitly sets out to expound the

passage beyond phenomenology (and a reductive ontology of entities) as a passage from the same to the other, from totality to infinity. In thus identifying infinity with alterity, and designating their discourse as eschatology, his thought comes to occupy the place of history within our analysis, as the mediation of nature (infinity) with the social (other), at the very point at which it leaves both phenomenology and history behind. Consideration of why this move does not work (for us), and the consequences of its failure, will demonstrate the necessity, first, of historicizing our approach, by supplementing the phenomenological ontology from which we set out with the kind of immanent historical analysis to which it was initially opposed, at the start of chapter 2; and second, of situating the ontological aspect of our conception of historical time within some broader notion of natural-history. These issues are best approached via Derrida's extraordinary early critique of Levinas, to which reference has already been made in our preliminary definition of history, in chapter 2, as 'the movement of the difference between totality and infinity'.¹⁹

The main point of Derrida's critique concerns Levinas's opposition of history, as totality, to the infinity of the eschatological beyond, such that eschatology is understood to institute a positive relation to being 'beyond history'.²⁰ This opposition follows from the interpretation of the exteriority of the Other as absolutely other. Derrida's (essentially Hegelian) argument is straightforward: 'the other cannot be absolutely exterior to the same without ceasing to be other.' The absoluteness of the Other must be phenomenologically relative, must be *posited* as absolutely other, if it is to be the term of a possible relation. As Husserl recognized, absolute exteriority is part of 'the phenomenal system of nonphenomenality'. This phenomenological necessity is reinforced, ethically, by the necessity that the Other be recognized as an *ego*, if it is to be the bearer of an ethical relation, however 'other' it might otherwise be: 'If the other was not recognised as an ego, its entire alterity would collapse.' In short, Levinas's metaphysics presupposes 'the transcendental phenomenology that it seeks to put into question'.²¹

Levinas attempts to avoid this problem through the notion of the face. The face is that which, 'a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it', opening us up to the infinite transcendence and ethical inviolability of the Other. The face is said to 'remain absolute within the relation'.²² Yet as Derrida shows, the contradiction in the idea of an encounter with the absolutely other reproduces itself in the notion of the face through which Levinas tries to overcome it. On the one hand, phenomenologically, as 'the non-metaphorical unity of body, glance, speech and thought', the face

must possess the essential finitude of the body, an *irreducibly spatial* exteriority. On the other hand, conceptually, as 'the corporeal metaphor of etherealised thought', it represents the positive infinity of an *absolute* (non-spatial) exteriority. The very attempt to mediate this contradiction relativizes the absoluteness of the other, phenomenologically, in the way we have already seen. The attempt at mediation is self-negating, returning us, as Derrida puts it, to 'the irreducibly *common* horizon of Death and the Other':

Metaphysical transcendence cannot be at once transcendence toward the other as Death and transcendence towards the other as God. Unless God means Death . . . at once All and Nothing, Life and Death. Which means that God is or appears, *is named*, within the difference between All and Nothing, Life and Death. Within difference, and at bottom as Difference itself.

Yet, Derrida triumphantly concludes: 'This difference is what is called *History*. God [such a God] is inscribed in it.' If the face is 'neither the face of God nor the figure of man', but their 'resemblance', then there is both literally and metaphorically no place from which it can be apprehended.²³

The lesson Derrida draws from this is, unsurprisingly, a deconstructive one. In order to comply with the logic of 'the break with phenomenology and ontology', Levinas should 'eliminate the notions of an *essence* and a *truth* of subjective existence (of the Ego, and primarily of the Ego of the Other)'. Yet he does not do so. Indeed, he 'cannot do so, without renouncing philosophical discourse'. However, according to Derrida, 'the attempt to achieve an opening toward the beyond of philosophical discourse' can *never* completely shake off the 'means of philosophical discourse'. Hence the symptomatic significance of Levinas's work. What we observe in the play of its internal contradictions is the imposition of the deconstructive necessity of 'lodging oneself *within* traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it'. Phenomenology can open a dialogue with eschatology, can '*be opened* in it', but the dialogue is interminable, since each calls the other to silence.²⁴

However, one wonders whether Derrida has really done justice to Levinas's rupture of phenomenology here; indeed, whether, in his determination 'not to be enveloped by Hegel',²⁵ he has done justice to his own critique. What is at stake is the possibility of an expansion of the concept of experience beyond that delimited by Husserl's phenomenology, yet falling short of Hegelian speculation, in terms of which the concept of history might be understood: an eschatological

conception of experience in which the ontological significance of alterity would be retained, shorn of its theological gloss, in the register of historical time. It is just such a conception which we need in order to make sense of the idea of the historization of temporality by the anticipation of a timeless end. Its structure may be sought, firstly, in the phenomenological dimension of Levinas's exposition of infinity as desire; and secondly, in Derrida's elaboration of the consequences for the category of totality of his critique of the positive infinite. The eschatological dimension of *Totality and Infinity* is barely developed by Levinas, although it provides the book with its symbolic frame.²⁶ Exploring it here, in the context of our inquiry into the temporalization of history, and after Derrida's critique, we will read it against the grain of its theological self-consciousness in order to open it out to the multiplicity of the social which it evokes, but cannot think. This is a multiplicity in the name of which Levinas often speaks, while fleeing its concrete forms: a multiplicity which in actuality is not merely 'anarchic',²⁷ but *formed* in ways which resist reduction to the Same – forms of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), in fact, which are the object of both political economy and the sociology of cultural form.

Notoriously, Levinas derives his notion of infinity as metaphysical exteriority from Descartes' account of the idea of God in the Third of his *Meditations*. His innovation is to expound it as the structure of the relation to the Other, and hence as the point of contact or rupture between phenomenology and what he calls 'the ethical'. The infinite is defined as 'a relation with a being that maintains its total exteriority with respect to him who thinks it', and its fundamental determination is transcendence. Indeed, 'the transcendence of the Infinite with respect to the I which is separated from it and which thinks it *measures* (so to speak) its infinitude.' Levinas is not unaware of the kind of objection Derrida will make to this construction. Indeed, his counter to it lays the ground for his 'concretisation' of this 'apparently wholly empty notion'. 'To affirm the presence in us of the idea of infinity,' Levinas argues, 'is to deem *purely abstract and formal* the contradiction the idea of metaphysics is said to harbour, which Plato brings up in the *Parmenides* – that the relation with the Absolute would render the Absolute relative.' (This is Derrida's objection.) 'The absolute exteriority of the exterior being is not purely and simply lost as a result of its manifestation; it "absolves" itself from the relation in which it presents itself.'²⁸ It is this process of absolution which appears, from the standpoint of the finite, as the production of desire: 'Infinity is the idea of desire. It consists, paradoxically, in thinking more than what is thought while conserving it still in its

inordinateness relative to thought, entering into relationship with the ungraspable while certifying its status of being ungraspable.²⁹

Phenomenologically, then, infinity is 'not the correlate of the idea of infinity, as though this idea were an intentionality that is fulfilled in its object'. Rather, 'the marvel of infinity in the finite is the *overwhelming of intentionality*, the overwhelming of this appetite for light; unlike the saturation in which intentionality is appeased, infinity disconnects its idea.' Infinity is an '*attitude irreducible to a category*'.³⁰ The issue is whether we can think of this 'overwhelming of intentionality' as a special kind of experience – the experience of the limit of experience, perhaps – or whether it must not rather be conceived purely negatively, as its annihilation. Sticking to Husserl's conception of experience, as Derrida does (to avoid the spectre of Hegel), the latter option imposes itself by definition. Levinas also accepts this, as the consequence of an 'objective' conception of experience.³¹ However, Levinas continues: 'if experience precisely means a relation with the absolutely other, that is, with what always overflows thought, the relation with infinity accomplishes experience in *the fullest sense of the word*.'³² For Derrida, this is an illegitimately Hegelian sense. But is there really no third way here between Husserl and Hegel? Is it true, as Derrida maintains, that 'the only effective position to take in order not to be enveloped by Hegel' is 'to consider the false-infinity (that is, in a profound way, original finitude) irreducible'?³³ Is there not a disjunction, in fact, between original finitude and the false-infinity – that is to say, between Heidegger and Kant? Does the concept of experience associated with Heidegger's existentialism really reduce to Kant's? It seems unlikely.³⁴

Derrida arrives at this position because of his hostility to all positive conceptions of transcendence: the experience of a positive infinity. But the problem with the positivity of Levinas's conception of the infinite does not derive from the structure of the 'overwhelming of intentionality'. It derives from the *supplementary* interpretation of infinity as a *being* (God). This interpretation – the enactment of an *unequivocal* (rather than, as Derrida suggests, an equivocal) 'complicity of theology and metaphysics'³⁵ – is, philosophically, both arbitrary and incoherent. Its logic is the *cultural* logic of identification with a particular religious tradition. *Totality and Infinity* simply announces: 'We propose to call "religion" the bond that is established between the same and the other without constituting a totality.'³⁶ One might do otherwise. One might call it 'the social'. Once religion becomes the ground of interpretation, the strictly philosophical coherence of the idea (hunted down so remorselessly by Derrida) becomes somewhat besides the point. Religion is very far from being a side-show

when it comes to tracking the meaning and coherence of Levinas's philosophical ideas. In 'The Trace of the Other', Levinas insists:

we will, to be sure, not succumb to the temptation and the illusion that would consist in finding again by philosophy the empirical data of positive religion, but we will disengage a movement of transcendence that is ensured like the bridgehead of the 'other shore', without which the simple coexistence of philosophy and religion in souls and even in civilizations is but an inadmissible weakness of the mind.³⁷

The question is whether it is *necessary* to build this bridge in order to make philosophical sense of Levinas's ideas. Can we do without the transition to religious language? Not without certain changes in the structure and meaning of the ideas.

It is just such a transformation which I want to propose in the form of an immanent interpretation of the 'overwhelming of intentionality' as *historization* (historization of temporality/temporalization of history). From this point of view, you do not need God to play the role 'He' does in Levinas's philosophy, if you are prepared to think philosophically about history. On this model, history is immanent transcendence writ (and read) large, at the level of the species. Ultimately, its comprehension demands a dialectical reformulation of the relationship between the conventional notions of 'nature' and 'history', in the manner of something like Adorno's idea of 'natural-history' (*Naturgeschichte*).³⁸ This would allow us to thematize the emergence of temporality, the paradoxical idea of a nature 'before' time, and the subsequent relationship between natural and social history, within a unitary ontological discourse, thereby finally overcoming the tendency to subjectivism inherent in the phenomenological approach.³⁹

Outside or end? Totality, infinity, others

The metaphysical extravagance of Levinas's conceptions of infinity and the Other has its correlate in the poverty of his construal of totality and the Same. This construal is generalized to embrace both the whole history of 'Western philosophy' and (in tautological self-demonstration) the concept of history itself as an 'identification of the same'.⁴⁰ According to Levinas,

The judgment of history is set forth in the visible. Historical events are the visible par excellence; their truth is produced in evidence. The visible

forms, or tends to form, a totality. It excludes the apology, which undoes the totality by inserting into it, at each instant, the unsurpassable, the unencompassable present of its very subjectivity. The judgment at which the subjectivity is to remain apologetically present has to be made against the evidence of history (and against philosophy, if philosophy coincides with the evidence of history).⁴¹

History is identified with judgement and the 'continuous time' of 'works', in opposition to *subjectivity*, the *instant* and the *will*, each of which registers the infinite difference of the relation to the Other, in one way or another. 'Each instant of historical time in which action commences,' Levinas argues, 'is, in the last analysis, a birth, and hence breaks with the continuous time of history, a time of works and not wills. . . . the will seeks judgment in order to be confirmed against death, whereas judgment taken as the judgment of history kills the will qua will.'⁴²

It is not difficult to recognize in these descriptions the 'history' of a mundane and unreflective historiography, Heidegger's 'ordinary understanding of history', or what Benjamin calls 'historicism'.⁴³ However, while Heidegger and Benjamin approach this conception phenomenologically, as a starting point from which to develop more adequate alternatives, Levinas fixes the concept of history here, in opposition to eschatology, in the realm of 'the Same'. As Derrida remarks: 'totality, for Levinas, means a finite totality.' Yet, as we have seen, we cannot make sense of the alterity of the 'absolute exteriority of the other' unless it appears *within* the zone of the same. What 'other' means is 'phenomenality as disappearance'. The same cannot be reduced to 'a totality closed in upon itself, an identity playing with itself, having only the appearance of alterity'. It must contain the difference between itself and the other within its difference from itself.⁴⁴ And what else is the production of this difference but the infinite movement of temporalization: time as infinite totalization, temporalization as immanent transcendence (freedom)?

What of the specifically 'historical' dimension of this movement, and its relation to eschatology? It is here that Derrida's deconstructive scepticism about the possibility of stepping outside the 'Inside-Outside' structure of philosophical language – about the possibility of weaning language from spatial metaphors – when combined with Levinas's notion of the time of the other, can be put to metaphysical use. For what Levinas cannot but think spatially through the metaphor of exteriority (the alterity of the Other) cannot but also appear temporally in the figure of the end: the 'absolute' horizon of an end to time. '*Outside* and *end*' are the spatial and temporal forms